REMARKS ON THE LAUNCH OF PARAGUAY’S NATIONAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY: PROGRESS DRIVEN BY A COMMON VISION

04 Dec 2014

Estimados señoras y gentlemen,

I am delighted and honored to address you on this auspicious occasion, and I regret not being with you to extend my congratulations in person. When I last visited Paraguay in 2008 for the XI Foro de la Microempresa, serious discussions were already taking place about how best to provide formal financial services to small businesses and low-income families. Today, as you celebrate the launch of Paraguay’s national financial inclusion strategy, you can take great pride in being among the first countries in Latin America to reach this milestone.

Under the strong, effective leadership of the Comité Nacional de Inclusión Financiera, the process of creating a concrete strategy was accomplished in barely a year, an impressive timeframe that testifies to the deep commitment and hard work of all stakeholders—the ministries of finance and technical planning, the central bank, regulatory groups, and the private sector. Paraguay’s example offers an inspiring lesson for the world on how quickly progress can happen when the political will is strong and partners share a common vision.

Equally impressive has been the rigorous and thoughtful process leading up to the strategy’s creation. Recognizing the vital role of data in developing effective plans and policies, you generated solid new supply- and demand-side data to augment the Global Findex report. This new research has allowed for deeper insights into crucial topics such as remittances, insurance, and the fast-growing mobile financial services industry.

Paraguay should also be recognized for other steps it is taking to extend financial services to the 45 percent of the population that remains excluded. The country has emerged as a leader in mobile money in Latin America—28 percent use mobile financial services, one of the highest rates in the region. Your regulators are supporting this positive development by establishing a framework to formalize the role of mobile operators such as e-money issuers, recognizing that this kind of innovative technology holds tremendous promise for reaching the excluded and underserved. It takes innovative and confident regulators to create an environment in which these types of services can flourish, and I congratulate you on this important step.

With a detailed strategy in place, Paraguay is now entering the demanding stage of implementation. Executing this strategy will take a concerted effort whose success will depend, once again, on the sustained support of all stakeholders. All need to play to their strengths, coordinate efforts, and push in the same direction. As you begin this process, I encourage you to focus special attention on financial education and safeguarding customer protection. As access to financial services draws increasing numbers of your countrymen and women into the formal system, your continued attention to their needs will be really vital.

The work you have done is impressive and I look forward to following your progress in the months and years to come. I trust that you will continue to add your respected voice to the global conversation on financial inclusion. At the UN, I have been pleased to collaborate with Paraguay as a member of the Group of Friends of Financial Inclusion, an informal association of member states that advances financial inclusion at the UN in discussions surrounding the Post-2015 development framework.

Sharing experiences and solutions with the world, as you are doing, is the best way we have to transform financial inclusion into a global movement that can truly benefit us all. I greatly value your contribution and wish you every success. Gracias.

(video address)